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ABSTRACT

In 1977 leaders of Hardee County, Florida, listed relationships and attitudes of residents, rural atmosphere, environmental conditions, and economic potential among the county's strong points, and public service and facility improvements, developing economic potential, recreational and entertainment development, and planning and zoning as its most pressing needs. An area of over 400,000 acres on the Peace River in south central Florida, Hardee County was officially established in 1921. Population in the area grew slowly until after the railroad arrived in the 1880's when both farm products and land increased in value. Historically, agriculture has dominated the local industrial scene, with citrus production, which grosses an estimated $31 million annually, especially important. While agriculture will continue to be important, phosphate mining may provide a major impetus to the county's growth by 1990. Since 1950 there have been increases in service group, clerical, craftsmen, and foremen occupations. The county's median income in 1969 was much lower than that of the state of Florida, which averaged only half as many living below poverty level. The county also contrasted the state's booming population growth trends until 1970 when an upsurge began. (SB)

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A Profile of Hardee County, Florida *

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Preface

The following was developed as part of the Regional Project S-120 "Social Organization for Development in Rural Counties in the South." The project is being conducted in eight southern land-grant institutions and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico under the auspices of State Experiment Stations and the Cooperative State Research Service of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. The general objective of the project is to better understand how rural counties organize and function to being about social and economic development.

This paper provides a profile of one of the Florida counties studied, Hardee County. A brief history of the county as well as its population and economic characteristics are examined. Moreover, local community leaders' perceptions of the county - the things liked and the things in need of improvement - are discussed.

The History of Hardee County

The area presently identified as Hardee County has been part of five different counties. In 1822, it was part of Escambia County but became part of Dade County in 1836 when the decision was made by the civil government to create smaller civil units in Florida. By 1855, it had become a part of the newly created Manatee County. It remained a piece of this latter county until 1877 when DeSoto County was established. It was not until April 1921 that a portion of DeSoto County was divided into the County of Hardee (Plowden; 1929). It was named for Governor Cary Hardee who was in office at the time of the county's inception.

Although the Second Seminole War hed ended in 1842, skirmishes continued between southbound settlers and Indians remaining in the area after the war. As a consequence, a number of military installations were built as early as 1849 in the area now known as Hardee County (Covington; 1961 b). Additional fortifications, including Fort Hartstuff and Fort Green, were established in the area in the 1850's as a result of the forced withdrawal (due to illness) of the federal troops who were located there (Miller and Schene; 1978). Fort Hartstuff served as a haven for many settlers and developed into what is now the county seat of Hardee County, Wauchula.

Following the Third Seminole War and Civil War, greater number of settlers began moving southward into unsettled portions of Florida. The Homestead Act of 1862 also was an important stimulus resulting in an influx of new families into the Hardee County area. Even in light of the new families and communities, progress in the area was slow until the arrival of railroads in the 1880's (Frisbie: 1974). Towns grew as the railroad traversed new territory. A surge in land purchases for speculation, agriculture and settlements ensued.

With the new territory opened up by the railroads, farm products and land increased sharply in value. By 1905, DeSoto County (of which present day Hardee County was then part) produced one-tenth of the total value of farm crops in the entire State of Florida (Plowden; 1929:25).

Development in Hardee County was influenced by the Wauchula Development Company and the Wauchula Manufacturing Company. The former sold pine timber to the latter company, which produced crates for vegetables and oranges. Plowden (1929:37) notes that no single industry resulted in bringing in as many settlers as did these companies and much of the modern development of Hardee County could be traced to the stimulus provided by them. In fact, Wauchula Manufacturing Company advertised extensively in magazines and newspapers located in northern states resulting in a large influx of settlers into Hardee County.

During the 1920's, Hardee County experienced an economic boom. Vegetables, citrus, and hogs were exported north along the railroads. With the large herds of cattle found in the county's open range, cattle became an important factor in the locality's economic health. Turpentine and lumber companies also evolved. It is clear that with the division of Hardee County from DeSoto County on April 21, 1921, more settlers came and a new surge of growth began.

Topography and Geography

Hardee County is located in south central Florida and encompasses an area of approximately 403,000 acres. Throughout the county may be found numerous areas of high, dry land interspersed with small swamps. More extensive wetlands are evident along the Peace River and its tributaries. Hardee County straddles the Peace River.

The soils in Hardee County are generally sandy and have poor drainage characteristics. However, drainage is significantly better in higher areas of the county. Seven soil types are observable in the area, ranging from the sloping soils which are sandy due to excessive drainage , to the swamp association type soils which are poorly drained and subject to prolonged flooding.

The climate is temperate with an average annual temperature of 73 degrees Fahrenheit; an average low of 63 degrees and an average high of 82 degrees. Annual rainfall is approximately 58 inches with the heaviest amounts falling during the months of June thru August.

Demographic Profile

The information detailed in Table 1 reveals that Hardee County's population growth was moderate during the 1950-1960 time period (+22.8%). This pattern is in sharp contrast to the substantial growth experienced by the State of Florida as a whole during the same span of time (+78.7%). While growth remained slow to moderate in the ten year interval 1960-1970, population increases have been on the upswing in recent years. As of 1976, Hardee County had already experienced a population growth of 23% from the 1970 base period, a figure closely aligned with the state's growth pattern during the same period of time.

Components of the County's population change are outlined in Table 2. In both the 1950-1960 and 1960-1970 intervals, natural increase was the major contributor to population growth. This trend has now reversed itself. Nearly 70% of the population expansion between 1970-1976 has resulted from net

TABLE 1: Population Growth Patterns of Hardee County, 1950-1976

	Population	
YEAR	HARDEE COUNTY	FLORIDA
1950	10,073	2,771,305
1960	12,370	4,951,560
1970	14,889	6,791,418
1976	18,319	8,551,814
% CHANGE		
1950-1960	22.8%	78.7%
1960-1970	20.4%	37.2%
1970-1976	23.0%	25.9%

Sources: U. S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Population (1950, 1960, 1970). General Population Characteristics - Florida; Florida Statistical Abstract 1977 Ralph B. Thompson (ed.). Gainesville: University Presses of Florida.

TABLE 2: Components of Population Change in Hardee County, 1950-1976.

		Components of Change			
TIME PERIOD	POPULATION CHANGE	NATURAL INCREASE NO.	NATURAL INCREASE %	NET MIGRATION NO.	NET MIGRATION %
1950-1960	2297	1293	56.3	1004	43.7
1960-1970	2519	1410	56.0	1109	44.0
1970-1976	3430	1050	30.6	2380	69.4

Sources: U. S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Population (1950, 1960, 1970). General Population Characteristics - Florida; Florida Statistical Abstact 1977, Ralph B. Thompson (ed.). Gainesville: University Presses of Florida.

migration. It appears that migration has now become the dominant factor in Hardee County's population growth. Increases in citrus production and related processing activities have been influential factors spurring the in-migration trend.

Unlike the State of Florida which has had a larger and larger share of its population residing in urban areas since 1950 (from 65.5% in 1950 to 80.5% in 1970), Hardee County has had a proportional increase in its rural population over the same twenty-year period (from 71.5% in 1950 to 79.7% in 1970). The age distribution of county residents has remained reasonably stable. The steady increase in the State's elderly population since 1950 is not reflected in the Hardee County data. Limited fluctuations in the racial composition of the county are also worthy of note in the twenty-six year period (1950-1976).

Economic Profile

Hardee County's economy has been historically dominated by the agricultural sector. Although agriculture employed a smaller portion of county residents in 1970 than in 1950 (35.5% to 47.2%) it clearly remained the principal industry in Hardee County (see Table 4).

Citrus production generates the greatest dollar volume in the County with cattle and truck crops serving as important secondary influences. Approximately 45,000 acres of citrus are in commercial groves; over 2,600 acres of truck crops are in harvest and beef cattle numbers some 65,000. The following estimated dollar yields result from these major agricultural products (Adley Associates; 1977).

	GROSS
Citrus	$30,800,000
Cattle	$ 3,000,000
Truck Crops . . .	$ 6,100,000

Agriculture traditionally has been and will continue to be in the immediate future the instrumental force behind Hardee County's economic health.

The occupational characteristics of employed Hardee County residents are consistent with the industrial types as outlined in Table 4. Approximately one-third of the working force in 1970 were farmers, farm managers, foremen or laborers. However, this does represent a decline of 12.7% from the 1950 figure. Percentage increases have occurred in the clerical, craftsmen, foremen, and service groups over the twenty-year period.

Median income for Hardee County families in 1969 was $5792, substantially lower than the state's $8267 (see Table 5). The incidence of poverty was also noticably different from the state average. The 24.2% of all families in Hardee County living below poverty level in 1970 was nearly double the Florida figure of 12.7%. Moreover, some 31% of all persons in the county were living in poverty as opposed to the state mean of 16.4%.

TABLE 3: General Population Characteristics of Hardee County, 1950-1976.

	Total Population	% Urban	% Rural	AGE DISTRIBUTION % Under 18	% 18-64	% 65+	RACIAL COMPOSITION % White	% Non-White
HARDEE								
1950	10,073	28.5	71.5	34.9	55.5	9.6	92.6	7.4
1960	12,370	27.6	72.4	37.0	52.7	10.3	90.6	9.4
1970	14,889	20.3	79.7	37.8	52.2	10.0	89.5	10.5
1976	18,319	NA	NA	35.2	54.5	10.3	91.6	8.4
FLORIDA								
1950	2,771,205	65.5	34.5	30.0	61.4	8.6	78.2	21.8
1960	4,951,560	73.9	26.1	34.0	54.8	11.2	82.0	18.0
1970	6,791,418	80.5	19.5	31.1	54.3	14.6	84.2	15.8
1976	8,551,814	NA	NA	27.2	56.1	16.7	86.3	13.7

NA = Not Available

Sources: U. S. Bureau of the Census. County and City Data Book, 1972; U. S. Bureau of the Census. General Population Characteristics; Florida Statistical Abstact, 1977, Ralph B. Thompson (ed.).

TABLE 4: Industrial and Occupational Groupings in Hardee County, 1950-1970

	Year		
	1950	1960	1970
TYPE OF INDUSTRY (%)			
Agriculture, Forestry	47.2%	30.7%	35.7%
Mining	1.3	1.8	3.7
Construction	4.9	6.9	5.4
Manufacturing	5.1	6.8	9.1
Transportation Services	2.0	1.9	1.9
Communications	0.3	0.6	1.3
Utilities & Sanitary Services	1.1	1.7	2.3
Wholesale and Retail Trade	19.4	21.4	16.6
Fin./Ins./Real Estate/Bus. Repairs	3.4	4.5	4.8
Personal Services	7.2	8.5	8.9
Education Services	3.2	3.7	5.6
Prof./Pub. Admin.	3.6	4.1	3.4
Other	1.4	7.4	1.1
OCCUPATION (%)			
Prof., Technical	4.5%	6.3%	6.5%
Manager, Admin.	7.7	9.0	5.5
Sales	5.7	5.6	4.8
Clerical	5.0	8.0	11.2
Craftsmen, Foremen	7.4	9.7	11.6
Operatives/Transport	11.2	16.4	9.2
Non-Farm Laborers	4.6	2.8	3.5
Service Workers	4.5	5.2	6.8
Private Household Workers	2.5	2.8	2.6
Farmers, Managers, Laborers, Foremen	45.9	27.8	33.2
Others	1.0	6.4	5.2
TOTAL NUMBER EMPLOYED	3953	4438	5496

Source: U. S. Bureau of the Census. General Social and Economic Characteristics

Table 6 shows the five principal sources of income for Hardee County residents. The trend since 1965 has been toward an increase of wages and salaries as the primary source of income, from 38.5% in 1965 to 43.2% in 1975. Proprietor's income, while still a sizable source of personal income for residents in 1975 (26.6%), was 13.6% lower than its 1965 figure.

As a general statement, it is clear that agriculture has historically performed and continues to perform an instrumental role in the economic growth of Hardee County. However, it will likely not represent the major growth factor in the future. Rather,phosphate mining may well provide a major impetus to the county's growth activity. Eleven phosphate companies presently own or have options on nearly one-third of the land in Hardee County. Within the next ten to fifteen years, phosphate mining will most likely become an integral part of the county's economy. As a result, the future well-being of Hardee County will be enhanced.

Local Leadership's Present Perceptions of Hardee County

In July 1977, thirty-three individuals identified as community leaders were interviewed as part of the S-120 Regional Project. A major portion of the interview was directed at discerning the county leaderships' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the county, that is, the nature of the county's attractions and shortcomings. The results of these discussions are reported below.

The methodology employed in the identification of the local leadership involved three steps:

1) Newspapers, minutes of county commissioners' meetings, and minutes of other relevant organization meetings were closely examined for the purpose of identifying persons providing leadership to the areas of development of interest to the regional research group (i.e., economic development, development of health related services and programs, and development of community facilities).

2) Once identified, these visible leaders were interviewed. In the discussions, each was asked to name other individuals with whom they were in contact and who contacted them in regard to the substantive areas under review.

3) Persons receiving multiple nominations as influentials by the visible leaders were subsequently interviewed.

Hardee County's Strengths

Each community leader was asked to indicate the three things he or she liked most about Hardee. While this resulted in a wide variety of responses, four attributes of the county emerged consistently (see Table 7).

Relationships with or attitudes toward others is the most appreciated

TABLE 5: Median Income and Incidence of Poverty in Hardee County, 1950-1976

	Year		
	1950	1960	1970
Median Family Income	$1,720	$3,602	$5,702
% Below Poverty Level			
Families	NA	NA	24.2%
Households	NA	NA	30.1%
Persons	NA	NA	31.1%

Sources: U. S. Bureau of the Census. General Social and Economic Characteristics; U. S. Bureau of the Census. County and City Data Book, 1952, 1962, 1972.

NA = Not Available

Table 6: Principal Sources of Personal Income, Hardee County

	YEAR		
	1965	1970	1975
Wages and Salary Disbursement	38.6%	42.3%	43.1%
Other Labor Income	1.5	1.7	2.2
Proprietor's Income	39.1	33.1	25.6
Dividends, Interest, Rent	10.9	11.1	12.7
Transfer Payments	9.9	11.8	16.3

Source: State of Florida, Division of Economic Development. Hardee County Economic Data (April 1977).

aspect of Hardee County. The leaders described this element as the friendly nature and cooperative spirit of the people. A typical response referenced the "accord among the local residents."

Table 7: Leaders' Perceptions of Hardee County's Strengths

	Number of Mentions	Percent of all leaders (n=33)
Relationships and Attitudes	33	100.0
Rural Area	20	60.6
Environment	16	48.5
Moderate Growth and Development	8	24.2

The second most liked characteristic is the rural atmosphere of the county. The quiet, rural environment, the slow-paced lifestyle, the religious attitudes and values make this county a good place to enjoy life, pursue goals, and raise children.

Pleasant environmental conditions is also a much treasured quality reported by the leaders. The lack of pollution and traffic congestion combined with the beauty of the lakes and countryside make Hardee County an enjoyable place to live. In addition, the county's close proximity to metropolitan areas outside of the county provides it with the convenience to shopping facilities without the problems of urban living.

Respondents also considered the economic potential of the county as an important quality. The range of business opportunities, from citrus and ranching to industry, as well as the available labor force, make the county amenable to moderate growth and development.

Hardee County's Needs

The thirty-three community leaders were also asked to indicate the three most important problems or needs confronting Hardee County. The results are noted in Table 8.

The need most often expressed is the concern with the improvement of public services and facilities. In particular, improvement of county roads and highways are viewed as high priorities. Better sewage and sanitary facilities also emerge as pressing needs. Lastly, the need for quality education, that is, "an upgrading of the school system", is singled out. Several leaders associate this latter problem with the sizable migrant work force in the county who, given their transient way of life, pay few taxes but take advantage of the county's public school system.

The area ranking second in importance is the development of the economic potential of Hardee County. The need for both a year-round payroll and opportunities for the youth of the county highlights the importance of persuading small, clean industries to locate in the area.

Table 8: Leaders' Perceptions of Hardee County's Needs

	Number of Mentions	Percent of all leaders (n=33)
Public Facilities	21	63.6
Economy	16	48.5
Recreation/Entertainment	14	42.4
Planning and Zoning	10	30.3
Health	5	15.1
Housing	3	9.1

Recreation/entertainment and planning and zoning are identified as two additional needs of the community. With respect to the former, leaders feel that youth recreational facilities and cultural opportunities are seriously lacking in Hardee County. As for the latter, they feel that the haphazard, piecemeal residential zoning presently being practiced will be in the long run, of detriment to the county. Consequently, they strongly encourage the establishment of a systematic planning and zoning effort.

Ranking fifth in the needs and problems of the county is the area of health-related facilities. This concern is expressed most often in connection with the need for additional doctors. While county leaders indicate some satisfaction with the present health facilities, they strongly support expansion of these facilities in order to lessen their dependence for health care needs on surrounding urban areas.

Finally, more and improved housing is an important need of Hardee County. Better housing would enhance, leaders believe, the county's ability to attract both industrial prospects and physicians.

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